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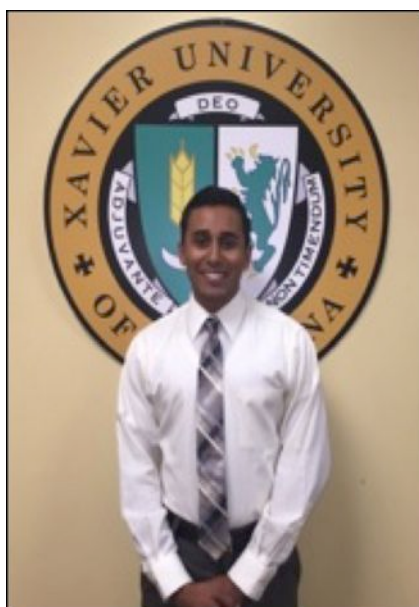
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## **Aversive Racism: The Catalyst for Destruction within Black Communities**

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### **Abstract**

The historical development of African Americans has been largely due to the coalitions among black communities to improve their social, economic, and political position in the United States. After the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, aversive racism began to be expressed during the 1970s in the American social, political and economic climate. Aversive racism is an indirect form of racism which is expressed through negatively biased attitudes instead of overt and open discrimination. Shown through historical events after the 1970s, this appears to be a strong driving force that influenced the United States government's lack of substantial relief, protection, and support to the African Americans in disadvantaged communities. The purpose of this research is to examine the context of aversive racism which influenced the introduction of crack cocaine into black communities and the government's intervention methods to curtail these cocaine sources. Three measures will be examined: introduction of crack cocaine, the criminal system which curtails this substance, and the glorification of selling crack cocaine expressed through music. Avenues towards aversive racism need to be examined in order to move towards a more just society.

### **Key Terms:**

- Aversive Racism
- Crack Cocaine
- Music Industry
- Criminal Justice System

The historical development of African Americans has been largely due to the coalitions among black communities which empowered them to tackle their political, social, and economic obstacles. Once emancipated after the Civil War (1861-1865), African Americans were labeled as “black.” This racial label was socially constructed in order to keep the black population substandard to people socially classified as “white.” After the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, aversive racism was expressed in the American social, political and economic climate given the move toward political correctness and the prohibition of public discrimination. Aversive racism is an indirect form of racism which is expressed through negative bias attitudes instead of overt and open discrimination. According to Dovidio and Gaertner, aversive racism is structured around the conflict “between whites’ denial of personal prejudice and underlying unconscious negative feelings toward and beliefs about blacks.”<sup>1</sup>

Historical events after the 1970s illustrate the United States government’s lack of relief, protection, and support to disadvantaged African American communities. The purpose of this research is to examine the context of aversive racism which influenced the introduction of crack cocaine into black communities and the government’s intervention methods to curtail these cocaine sources. Three measures will be examined: introduction of crack cocaine, the criminal system which curtails crack cocaine, and the glorification of the introduction of crack cocaine expressed through music.

It may be misleading to assume that blacks introduced crack cocaine into their own black communities during the 1980s. Of course, these members perpetuated the issue by continuing to sell across the masses. However, the core of crack cocaine’s origin and supply must be studied more deeply. Drugs such as cocaine are largely imported from South

American countries.<sup>2</sup> What made crack cocaine alarming was its relative affordability for the average American.<sup>3</sup> From the late 1970s through the early 1990s, large quantities of cocaine were imported into urban cities across the United States. This raises an important question: how were huge amounts of cocaine imported into the United States, especially into African American communities, without being stopped by authorities?

Gary Webb addressed the cocaine pandemic in a detailed investigation of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency’s involvement in the drug cartels.

For the better part of the decade, a Bay Area drug ring sold tons of cocaine to the Crips and Bloods street gangs of Los Angeles and funneled millions in drug profits to a Latin American guerilla army run by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. This drug network, federal records show, opened the first pipeline between Colombia’s cocaine cartels and the black neighborhoods of Los Angeles, a city now known as the crack capital of the world. The cocaine it brought into the United States fueled the crack explosion in urban America, and the simultaneous rise to power of the murderous gangs of black L.A.<sup>4</sup>

The CIA’s motives were geared to overthrow a Communist regime in Nicaragua whose efforts have been persistent since the Bay of Pigs during the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Webb’s investigation provides evidence that the introduction of crack into urban black communities across states such as California, Colorado, New York, South Carolina, Florida, and Nevada was certainly not a coincidence.<sup>6</sup> CIA officials tried to keep this scheme discreet when local law enforcement arrested leaders of drug cartels who were under the command of CIA agents.<sup>7</sup> These drug leaders

testified about the CIA's involvement in their cartels' cocaine importation into black communities. The agency readily denied its involvement, but ironically began to classify the records pertaining to the scandal, removing them from public access until after the media directed its attention toward political issues.

Once the drug cartel leaders testified, the apparent blame was on the CIA, but the agency quickly presented bureaucratic evidence to disprove a direct link to the scandal to preempt official government investigations.<sup>8</sup> After political pressure, the CIA had to officially explain their side to the story. An internal investigation into the CIA's involvement came to this conclusion: "No information has been found to indicate that the drug trafficking activities of Blandon and Meneses were motivated by any commitment to support the Contra cause or Contra activities undertaken by Central Intelligence Agency."<sup>10</sup> Blame was shifted and focused away from the CIA with the help of mass media. "In 1986, politicians and the media focused on crack—and the drug scare began---when cocaine smoking (crack) became visible among a 'dangerous' groups in ghettos and barrios."<sup>11</sup> This shift to focus on blacks as the source of the crack problem suggests aversive racism.

Consequently, the government, whose agency had introduced crack cocaine, declared war on drugs whereby punitive laws were implemented to target powerful drug dealers. Before crack emerged in the U.S., powder cocaine was a common drug used by the upper class. However, by the end of the late 1970s, individuals found a method to smoke a crystalline form of cocaine. This was referred to as "crack or rock," and began to be pervasive in lower socioeconomic populations. However, the disparities are apparent in these laws because most of the individuals convicted with simple possession of crack cocaine were given higher

prison sentences than individuals charged with simple possession of other illegal substances.<sup>12</sup> Dimitri A. Bogazianos acknowledges the anomalies within the laws curtailing crack:

Crack's strange place in law—however anomalous—was clearly the result of a specific kind of reasoning. And this reasoning was at the heart of both the crack laws and what would soon become known as the 'Kingpin Strategy'.... The simple possession of five grams of crack cocaine—the amount, again, of a few sugar packets—was to be taken as *legal presumption* of serious trafficking.... Another, even more problematic contradiction at the heart of the law, however, was that crack, while treated as more lethal than any drug before it, has always been a low-level enterprise... While the rationale underlying the punishment of crack cocaine was—and will continue to be illogical and irrational, it is the violence that became associated with its low level distribution system that has been most devastating to the communities that it affected directly.<sup>13</sup>

Following the role of a government agency in cocaine trafficking, African Americans were further victimized through the disparaging laws to combat crack cocaine, yet another move suggesting aversive racism. The evidence given by Bogazianos suggests these laws, which were intended to decrease the source of crack, have unequal disparities towards black populations. According to a report from the U.S Sentencing Commission, "In establishing the mandatory minimum penalties for cocaine, Congress differentiated between the two principal forms of cocaine – cocaine hydrochloride [hereinafter referred to as powder cocaine] and cocaine base [hereinafter referred to as crack cocaine] – and provided significantly higher punishment for

crack cocaine offenses.”<sup>14</sup> As a result, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 was enacted that had mandatory minimum penalties for federal drug offenses. In addition, the Act exclusively stipulates sentences for specific drugs, especially crack cocaine. Since the foreign sources of crack cocaine were not targeted as much as the local urban dealers, this stirred up social havoc in black communities because of the increased incarceration of adult African American leaving younger ones to fill in their places. Essentially, the law’s “Kingpin Strategy” is a form of aversive racism whereby people, especially African Americans, caught with a small amount of crack are legally punished as if they are crack moguls who supply loads of drugs to the neighborhoods. At its core, the law is discriminatory because this is the only drug that has a mandatory sentencing policy for simple possession. The government’s attack on drug dealers coupled with the punitive drug laws adds more African Americans to the incarceration statistics, further deteriorating African American communities.<sup>15</sup>

If a person who has enough wealth is convicted for the possession of a large amount of powder cocaine, he or she will be given a lighter sentence than a person of a lower socioeconomic position convicted for simple possession of crack.<sup>16</sup> This sentencing disparity is showcased through the alarming number of African Americans sentenced to a minimum imprisonment compared to wealthier white counterparts. In addition, criminal records show that “the majority of people who report using crack at least once a year are white, [but] over 80 percent of those sentenced under federal crack laws have been black.”<sup>17</sup>

From an analytical perspective, David B. Mustard provides statistical data on the criminal justice system’s treatment of crack cocaine laws.

The contrasting laws for possession of crack and powdered cocaine constitute a frequently discussed example of a law allegedly written in a manner that produces sentencing differences. Over 90 percent of those convicted of possessing 5 grams of crack cocaine, a felony offense that carries a 5-year minimum sentence, are black. This contrasts sharply with penalties for powdered cocaine users, who are predominantly white. Conviction for possessing 5 grams of powdered cocaine is a misdemeanor punishable by less than a year in jail.<sup>18</sup>

These alarming statistics showcase that the government’s war on drugs accounts for the disproportion of African Americans incarcerated.<sup>19</sup> Empirical data suggests a biased racial attitude driven by aversive racism.

While there are some benefits to the war on drugs there are also side effects which perpetuate the deterioration of black communities. Incarcerating male figures from these communities cripple the structures of families. Incarceration statistics of black citizens provided by Mustard show that the criminal justice system may demonstrate aversive racism where crack laws fail to combat the sources of these drugs. Essentially, these laws excessively penalize the black neighborhood drug dealers through heavy drug charges, which falsely convict them as drug kingpins.<sup>20</sup> In 2010, President Obama signed a bill to repeal the 100 to 1 sentencing disparity between crack and cocaine powder. The reasoning behind this decision was that there is an “anomaly in the law since no other drug had a mandatory federal prison sentence.”<sup>21</sup>

Over time, especially in rap music, record labels began to promote artists as kingpins to deceptively symbolize success. When the rise of cocaine swept the streets of urban areas, rap



music initially was a form of expression about artists' negative experiences of living in a crack-infested environment.<sup>22</sup> Dennis Herd shines light on the shift in the theme within the genre toward a surge of drug-related references in the lyrics and music videos.

The shift from anti- to pro- drug messages to the early 1990s cites commercial success as a reason for increasing drug-related themes in rap music. In 1991, a Los Angeles group called Cypress Hill released their debut album featuring continuous marijuana use in songs like 'Stoned is the Way of the Walk'...The prominence of drug use in rap music may also be related to the business connections between drugs and rap... [it] is the apparent commodification of the personal histories of drug crimes and addiction to promote the rappers and their labels.<sup>23</sup>

An alarming trend is thus seen where the rap industry glorifies the drug market. The cause of the shift becomes apparent when examining the music record labels. In addition, Boganzanios illustrates how the record labels denigrate African American communities. "This equation signifies a moral indictment at whose heart lies duplicity: the duplicity of a white-collar world that intentionally preys on vulnerable artists and the duplicitous nature of a punitive infrastructure in which mere couriers of an inherently impure product are held solely accountable for the community destabilizations that only the forces of deindustrialization and coercive mobility could have ever produced."<sup>24</sup> These corporations are capitalizing from rap artists, a number from drug dealing backgrounds, and selectively broadcast songs that revere the "gangster." The companies' intentional use of vulnerable artists to saturate music with crack distribution references further promotes negative racial attitudes toward inner city black populations. To

sensationalize the status of a drug-dealing gangster, music has been proliferated through mainstream radio, so that artists convey messages that selling drugs is a way to earn respect among their peers and become "hood rich."<sup>25</sup>

Popular gangsta rap music narrowly shines the light on the rare success stories of escaping the ghetto by selling crack. Jay-Z is probably the most prominent example of an individual who grew up in Brooklyn projects, who boasted about his involvement in dealing crack cocaine, but is now a wealthy A-list celebrity.<sup>26</sup> The lavish lifestyle, social acceptance, and fame draw in susceptible youth who are the primary listeners of the music, which then distorts their perception of what it means to succeed in life. The promoted rap music ignores the actual consequences of an artist's initial success from selling crack.

Corporate recording labels hold the power of the music industry as they are responsible for distribution and marketing of gangsta rap music. Evidence suggests that large music recording companies under the ownership of mostly white-operated power structures control African American rap music production, and exploit urban living conditions that impact African Americans.<sup>27</sup> Author Norman Kelly showcases the disparities in the music industry and its consequences that negatively affect African Americans.

African Americans are essentially trapped in a state of relative *underdevelopment* in this market-driven society. This anomaly is due to the fact that blacks have been deprived of the five instrumental freedoms: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective securities.... With rap music, the inner cities have become the

raw sites of cultural production and the music, once packaged, is sold to the suburbs, to white youths who feel they can relate to those of the urban Bantustans (but don't have to pay the social consequences of being black in a predominantly white society)... The war for the control of black music was won many years ago by corporate America... Major labels rushed in only when they saw the staying power of the music and young white audiences, the desired demographic that was buying it... In a March 1997 issue of *Newsweek*, rap was once again blamed for the ills of black America. But in the report, the white-controlled industry was nowhere to be found, nor were the white youths who buy sixty-six percent of the rap music.<sup>28</sup>

Often predominately white corporations become wealthy, while a number of rap artists have a moment of fame and wealth, suddenly disappear, and inevitably return to drug dealing.<sup>29</sup> Even the artists who become successful still reference the crack market in their lyrics because the record labels selectively choose to promote those songs. The black rap artists who call the music industry a game to win understate the actual implications set by the record labels who maintain a firm control in the industry.

Ultimately, the record companies are the leaders of the entire music industry, from production to broadcast to publicity.<sup>30</sup> Shifting themes in hip-hop toward glorification of materialism and criminal behavior contributes to social problems in black communities. Record labels' rampant production and selective broadcast of drug-themed music showcases a lack of concern for the social welfare of black communities. Even though these music corporations are providing a means to uplift black individuals into success, this often is short-lived and fosters a false reality that the drug

world is the first step to success. Additionally, big record labels owned by black individuals, such as Bad Boy Records and Cash Money Records, also promote and perpetuate the social issue of placing the "gangster" on a pedestal. Unfortunately, this advertisement adds fuel to the deterioration of the black communities because the individuals who attempt this method are often added to the incarceration statistics. The record labels manipulation of the hip-hop world illustrates an example of aversive racism in a social and economic context.

The institutionalized social construct of aversive racism targets the structure of African American communities. After providing aid to foreign militaries (Contras) who, in turn, imported powder cocaine into the U.S, the CIA sparked the introduction of crystalline crack cocaine. The legislation to curtail the sources of crack is a bureaucratic anomaly that sentence minor drug-dealing offenders as if they were trafficking drugs into the United States.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the legislation accounts for racial disparities, shown through the contrasts between white and African American incarceration statistics. After incarcerating large numbers of adult African American drug dealers, this led to destabilization of African American communities due to the youths' loss of adult leadership. To address this sense of loss, initially young African Americans turned to hip-hop as an outlet to express their condition about living in a crack-infested environment.<sup>32</sup> Exaggerated media attention that spotlights gangsta rappers distorts some black youths' perception of success as they attempt the same method, but often fail. Essentially, the forces broadcasted by white-owned recording companies selectively promote former drug dealing artists' experience in the crack market.<sup>33</sup> Continuing to fuel aversive racism, these companies broadcast a false image of the black community that glorifies the crack market and further deteriorates black communities. Until these negative racial

attitudes that perpetuate the destruction within black communities is addressed, avenues to aversive racism will continue to preempt promoting and sustaining a more just society.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> John F. Dovidio and Samuel L. Gaertner. "Aversive Racism." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 36. (2004), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Siddhartha Baviskar. "Colombia: Drugs and Democracy." *Economic and Political Weekly* 31. No. 11. (1996). 655.

<sup>3</sup> Jeff Grogger and Michael Willis. "The Emergence of Crack Cocaine and the Rise in Urban Crime Rates." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 82. No. 4. (2000) 520.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 24-28.

<sup>7</sup> Peter D. Scott and Jonathan Marshall. *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies and the CIA in Central America*. (University of California Press, 1998), 08.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>9</sup> Office of Inspector General. "Report of Investigation Concerning Allegations of Connections Between CIA and the Contras in Cocaine Trafficking to the United States." (Central Intelligence Agency, 1998)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>12</sup> Dimitri Bogazianos. *5 Grams: Crack Cocaine, Rap Music, and the War on Drugs*. (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012) 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>14</sup> U.S Sentencing Commission. "Report to Congress: Cocaine and Federal Sentencing Policy." *Federal Sentencing Reporter* 19. No. 5. (2007) 298

<sup>15</sup> Bogazianos, *5 Grams*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> 15 U.S Sentencing Commission. "Report to Congress: Cocaine and Federal Sentencing Policy." *Federal Sentencing Reporter* 19. No. 5. (2007) 300.

<sup>17</sup> Bogazianos, *5 Grams: Crack Cocaine*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Mustard, David. B. "Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Disparities in Sentencing: Evidence from the U.S Federal Courts," *Journal of Law and Economics* 44. 1 (2001): 288.

<sup>19</sup> King and Mauer. *The Sentencing Project, Sentencing with Discretion*, 135.

<sup>20</sup> Bogazianos, *5 Grams* 2.

<sup>21</sup> Gary G. Gindler. "The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010." *Office of Deputy Attorney General*. 2012, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Denise Herd. "Changes in drug use prevalence in rap music, 1979-1997," *Addiction Research and Theory* 16. 2 (2008): 175-176.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 175-176.

<sup>24</sup> Bogazianos, *5 Grams*, 53.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>26</sup> Jeff Chang. *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*. (St. Martin Press 2006) 61.



<sup>27</sup> Norman Kelley. *R&B (Rhythm and Business): The Political Economy of Black Music*. (New York: Akashic Books, 2005). 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 10-19.

<sup>29</sup> Eithne Quinn. *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap*. (Columbia University Press, 2005) 14.

<sup>30</sup> Kelly, *R&B*. 17

<sup>31</sup> Bogazianos, *5 Grams*, 147.

<sup>32</sup> Herd, *Changes in drug use*, 167.

<sup>33</sup> Kelley, *R&B (Rhythm and Business)*, 11.

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